

Notes on the Beginning of Printing on the Island of Trinidad

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Trinidad is an island colony of the British Empire off the north coast of South America. It is the most southerly of the British West Indies. It has an area of over 1,800 square miles, and a population of nearly half a million. The island's most widely known feature is the great asphalt lake, over a hundred acres in area, which appears to be inexhaustible. The United States now has a more active interest in Trinidad than before, since it leased from Great Britain in 1940 some favorable sites which it has since developed as naval bases.

There is here presented a brief statement of what I know regarding the beginnings of the press on the island of Trinidad, published with the hope that it will elicit additional facts to round out the story. It will be evident that the present account is highly inadequate.

The first evidence of printing on the island which is known to me, is the imprint on a 12-page booklet, in folio format, reported by José Toribio Medina as being in the Archivo de Indias at Seville, Spain, and described as follows:

Chacón, José María
✠ Ordenanza | publicada en
el Puerto Espana [sic], el 11 de
Agosto de 1786.

Colophon: Del Puerto de Espana |
De la Imprenta de Don Juan Cassan.

That there was a newspaper printed on the island of Trinidad at the beginning of 1790, and undoubtedly earlier is evidenced by a document in the Archivo de Indias cited by Medina. The governor of Trinidad, José María Chacón, wrote to the King on January 27, 1790, that he had ordered Juan [Jean?] Viloux, editor of the *Gazeta*, or weekly newspaper, which was printed on the island, to depart from there "for having reprinted in it, without my approval, various articles from the foreign newspapers about the present revolution in France, in which were published items calculated to spread discussion, corrupt the true faith, and disturb the good order of our rule;" a decision which was approved by the royal order of May 25, 1790.

More information regarding the local press under Spanish auspices is much to be desired, as is also discovery of examples of its printing.

Under British regime, the first trace of printing which I have encountered was in 1799, or 1800. According to a letter of June 4, 1937, from Miss M. Hart, secretary and

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librarian of the Trinidad Public Library, the *Trinidad Weekly Courant* began publication in 1799 while Joseph L. Ragatz in the list of newspapers in his scholarly *Guide for the Study of British Caribbean History*, gives 1800 as the year of its establishment. The answer may be gleaned from issues of the paper, if any can be found, or contemporary documentary evidence. But who was the publisher and printer?

On June 30, 1800, Governor Thomas Picton promulgated a printed ordinance for regulating the treatment of slaves, the original of which is believed to be in the Public Record Office, London. If this bears a printer's imprint, it would provide some desired information.

In the same year of 1800 was printed, in French, regulations for the maintenance of order entitled "Réglement, pour servir d'instruction aux commandants des differents quartiers de la colonie," also believed to be in the Public Record Office. This document also should be examined for a printer's imprint.

The name of the newspaper changed in 1808, according to the Ragatz list, to *The Trinidad Weekly Courant and Commercial Gazette*, and in 1813 to *The Trinidad Courant and Commercial Gazette*, which henceforth appeared twice a week.

The Trinidad Public Library has a volume of *The Trinidad Courant and Commercial Gazette* "printed every Wednesday and Saturday by M. Gallagher, Government Printer, Corner of Queen and St. Vincent Streets, 1817." The printer was Matthew (or Mathew) Gallagher, the author of an

intriguing publication entitled "Letters and Documents relative to the Emprisonment and Discharge of the Author. Trinidad, Printed by the Author, 1810." I should very much like to locate a copy of this publication, the title of which is cited by Deschamps in his *L'Imprimerie hors l'Europe*, though he gives the place of printing, in error, as Trinidad, Cuba.

In the Trinidad Public Library is a valuable volume of early proclamations, printed and in manuscript. The earliest printed proclamation is one dated June 19, 1813, bearing the imprint "Government Press, C. Lloyd." This imprint is found on proclamations through May 21, 1828.

Apparently Lloyd's hold on the post of "Government Printer" was interrupted, temporarily only, from about November 22, 1820, till about December 24, 1822, during which period W. Lower functioned as the public printer.

The status of Matthew Gallagher is not clear to me. In the imprints on most of the proclamations and orders in the Trinidad Public Library, his name appears as "Gallagher, printer." Yet on one proclamation dated January 15, 1814, and on another dated February 25, 1815, he printed "Matthew Gallagher, Government Printer, corner of St. Vincent and Queen's Street" and a somewhat similar imprint is found on issues of *The Trinidad Courant and Commercial Gazette* in 1817. During these years Lloyd was regularly imprinting jobs as "C. Lloyd, Government Printer." Perhaps the appointment was not exclusive.

Matthew Gallagher apparently passed to his heavenly reward early

in 1819, for on an Order dated March 26, 1819, the imprint reads: "By the Executor and Executrix of M. Gallagher, printer."

The next printer of whose work I have record was Charles Rollin Beach. An Order dated October 21, 1815, according to its imprint, was "Printed by Charles Rollin Beach, Port of Spain."

The Trinidad Gazette began publication on September 9, 1820, according to Miss Hart. The earliest issue of this paper in the Trinidad Public Library is No. 34 which appeared during January, 1821, printed by "William Lower, Government Printer, Queen Street." A like imprint having appeared on a Proclamation dated November 22, 1820, we can probably assume that Lower printed *The Trinidad Gazette* from the start of its publication. The imprint of "W. Lower, Government Printer," appeared on numerous orders and proclamations.

In 1824 Lower printed "Two Letters and an Address to His Excellency Sir R. Woodford, bart . . . and the Honorable the Board of Council, by William H. Burnley." The imprint on the title page of this 38-page booklet, the original of which is in the New York Public Library, reads: "Trinidad: Printed and Published by W. Lower, Government Printer."

Through April 14, 1825, the imprint now reading "Government Printer, C. Lloyd" continued to appear on public printing. But beginning with an order dated April 25, 1825, the imprint becomes "Government Press, C. Lloyd" indicating, it would appear, that the printing office was henceforth the property of the colonial govern-

ment. This was the only imprint to appear on documents of the colonial government.

Soon after Richard Doherty became acting governor, the documentary imprint became "Government Press, James Ramsay," which first appeared on a Proclamation dated December 24, 1829. This imprint continues throughout the year 1833, when the volume of proclamations in the Trinidad Public Library, for which I have descriptions through the courtesy of Professor Arthur E. Gropp, terminates.

Meanwhile another printer had begun work in Trinidad. The name of *The Trinidad Gazette* was changed in 1825 to *The Port of Spain Gazette*, which was then printed twice each week, on Wednesday and Saturday, by John Holman.

In a Port of Spain municipal document of February 2, 1826, appeared: "Printed by J. Holman & Co."

The *Trinidad Royal Gazette*, a weekly newspaper, was established in 1831, and is still being published today.

In addition to newspapers in the Trinidad Public Library, there is a good collection in the Registrar-General's Office at Port of Spain. That official has a practically complete file of the *Port of Spain Gazette* from 1829 on, *The Trinidad Gazette* for 1820-1822, the *Trinidad Standard* for 1841, a complete file of the *Trinidad Royal Gazette* for 1835, as well as some scattering issues of other papers.

There is also a good collection of Trinidad newspapers in the library of the American Antiquarian Society at Worcester, Massachusetts, U. S. A., including volumes of *The Port of*

Spain Gazette for the years 1829, 1833, 1834, 1836, 1837, 1841, and 1843. The issue of this bi-weekly dated January 3, 1829, is vol. 4, no. 1. This institution has also the 1846 volume of *The Trinidad Standard and West India Journal*. The January 1 issue of this bi-weekly is vol. 9, no. 838.

Henry James Mills came on the printing scene in Trinidad, but just when I cannot say. He printed, probably in 1838, E. L. Joseph's *History of Trinidad*. The preface of this was signed by "the Publisher of the Trinidad Almanac" and dated "Port of Spain, December 20, 1837," i.e. by Mills himself. Mills was apparently printing the *Port of Spain Gazette* at least as early as 1839, as is attested by his imprint on *Mills' Trinidad Almanac and Pocket Register for . . . 1840 . . .* reading thus: "Printed and published by Henry James Mills . . . Gazette Office, No. 6, Frederick-street." A copy of this almanac may be seen in the library of the Boston Athenaeum.

Mills printed between 1847 and 1859 a series of *Trinidad Ordinances*, a set of which are in the Harvard Law School Library. Those which bear

imprints were printed by "H. J. Mills, Government Printer," or "Henry James Mills, Government Printer."

It will be apparent that these fragmentary notes provide a very inadequate account of the history of the press of Trinidad. It is to be hoped that some historically-minded folks in England and in Trinidad may be willing to examine available sources, and put down on paper the available details.

The most needed work is examination of the volumes of Trinidad papers in the British Public Record Office, noting references to the press in manuscripts, and describing fully the fine collection of proclamations, ordinances, etc., in that collection.

The second requirement is examination at Port of Spain, and at Worcester, Mass., of the files of the earliest extant Trinidad newspapers for data bearing on local printing history.

If anyone is disposed to contribute some effort to ascertainment of the facts regarding early Trinidad printing, I will be glad to advise with them respecting methods of work. I may be addressed: Douglas C. McMurtrie, 950 Michigan Avenue, Evanston, Ill.

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